

Maurice Hinchey NEWS

26TH CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT, NEW YORK

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 10, 2002

HINCHEY AMENDMENT EXTENDS BAN ON FINGER LAKES DRILLING

WASHINGTON - U.S. Representative Maurice Hinchey (NY-26) on Tuesday succeeded in adding an amendment to the Interior Appropriations bill that would continue the ban on oil and gas drilling in the Finger Lakes National Forest (FLNF) through fiscal year 2003. Drilling in FLNF is banned in fiscal year 2002 by a provision in last year's Energy and Water spending bill.

"The Finger Lakes National Forest is enjoyed by tens of thousands of visitors each year, including many of my constituents," said Hinchey. "We cannot allow the only National Forest in New York to suffer the permanent damage that drilling would cause."

The FLNF was established by an Act of Congress in 1983 and has since become a popular destination for hikers, campers, horseback riders, and nature enthusiasts. It is also used for hunting, fishing and skiing in the colder months. Last year the U.S. Forest Service proposed leasing 13,000 of FLNF's 16,000 acres for oil and natural gas drilling.

A provision in the FY'02 Energy and Water Appropriations Act, which Hinchey strongly supported, banned drilling in FLNF for one year. Subsequently, the Forest Service withdrew its proposal, but did not foreclose the prospect of drilling in the future. Hinchey is an original cosponsor of a bill to permanently protect FLNF from oil and gas development.

"A permanent ban is the best solution," Hinchey added. "But until that ban is enacted, we can use appropriations bills to continue protecting this national forest on a year-by-year basis. These temporary measures also send a clear message to the Forest Service that a prohibition on oil and gas development in the Finger Lakes National Forest is strongly supported by New York's congressional delegation on a bipartisan basis."

Hinchey is the only New Yorker serving on the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee. His amendment, which was passed by the full Appropriations Committee on Tuesday, prevents the Forest Service from using any of its funding to prepare or issue a permit or lease for oil or gas drilling in FLNF during FY '03.